

At Work and Play

The modern bows were approximately three feet in length, most 411
of them made of wood, although there were a few sinew-backed or 321 ●
compound ones made of buffalo, elk, or mountain-sheep horn. The
latter were highly finished and required more time to make. They [435]
were worth from six to twenty ponies each.⁶

Not all men made bows in the same way, each workman following the method he thought best. The Comanche country stretched over a wide area, and the best bow materials found in one section might not be available in another. Methods varied with time also. Yet, in general, the process was much the same from the Pecos to the Arkansas and from the Cross Timbers to New Mexico. In making the horn or compound bow, the horns were first thrown into warm water and allowed to remain until they became flexible. They were then straightened and strips of suitable width were cut or sawed. After the strips were filed, shaved, scraped, or rubbed down until the flat sides fitted nicely, the desired length was obtained by overlapping and gluing the ends of from two to four slices. Another piece of horn was then laid on the center at the grasp, where it was glued fast. The whole was then filed or scraped down until it was well proportioned. All the joints were firmly bound with sinew to give resiliency to the bow. Several weeks were required for a skilled workman to make a good, ornamented bow of this type.

Bows were sometimes, though rarely, made of a single piece of horn. A long piece, as nearly straight as possible, was whittled, scraped, and rubbed until it was quite thin. After being made pliable by heating, greasing, and working, it was lashed to a straight stick and left until dry and straight. It was then firmly wrapped with sinew, which was secured in place with glue. Bows of buffalo ribs were sometimes made by the same process. Such bows, however, were of little practical use.

The wooden bow was the common bow of the Comanches. It was 322
made principally from the Osage orange, or *bois d'arc*. Some Indian 411
tribes called the tree "smooth bow"; the Omahas referred to it as yellowwood, but the French gave it the name *bois d'arc*, by which it is best known. It was plentiful along the Arkansas and Canadian rivers and in the eastern fringe of the Comanche country southward

⁶ Garretson, *op. cit.*, 178.